

Minutes of a meeting of the **Council** held on **Tuesday 19 December 2023** at **7.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present

Councillors

Chair Roger Dicker

Vice Chair Pat Hanlon

Richard Alecock	Beccy Hopfensperger	Marion Rushbrook
Peter Armitage	Ian Houlder	Jools Savage
John Augustine	Janne Jarvis	Marilyn Sayer
Sarah Broughton	Gerald Kelly	Ian Shipp
Tony Brown	Rowena Lindberg	Andrew Smith
Carol Bull	Jon London	David Smith
Mike Chester	Aaron Luccarini	Liz Smith
Patrick Chung	Victor Lukaniuk	Andrew Speed
Nick Clarke	Charlie Lynch	Sarah Stamp
Dawn Dicker	Birgitte Mager	Frank Stennett
Andy Drummond	Margaret Marks	David Taylor
Paul Firman	Sara Mildmay-White	Jim Thorndyke
Susan Glossop	Andy Neal	Julia Wakelam
John Griffiths	Richard O'Driscoll	Cliff Waterman
Luke Halpin	Sue Perry	Indy Wijenayaka
Donna Higgins	Sarah Pugh	Phil Wittam
Diane Hind	Karen Richardson	Kevin Yarrow
Rachel Hood	Richard Rout	

317. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

318. Chair's announcements

The Chair reported on the civic engagements and charity activities which he and the Vice-Chair had attended since the last ordinary meeting of Council on 26 September 2023.

The Chair specifically made reference to attending a recent event in Stowmarket where an array of over 300 Christmas trees were on display in the local church; and that he was pleased to be invited to attend a meeting of Great Barton Parish Council to formally recognise Parish Councillor Peter Fisk for 47 years' service on Great Barton Parish Council.

319. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Michael Anderson, Mick Bradshaw, Andrew Martin, Joe Mason, Lora-Jane Miller-Jones, Joanna Rayner, Karen Soons and Don Waldron.

Tracy Whitehand was also unable to attend the meeting.

320. **Declarations of interests**

Members' declarations of interest are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

321. **Public participation**

Prior to the commencement of this item, the Chair welcomed the members of the public sitting in the public gallery. He explained the rationale for the recent changes made to the rules regarding public participation, as set out in the Council Procedure Rules in Part 4 of the Constitution.

The Chair then invited the following members of the public to speak under this agenda item:

1. **Jo Owen**, a resident in the district, asked a question in connection with an incident where the Council had been subject to a bank mandate fraud which had resulted in a loss of £52,000 to the Council and how the Council was intending to re-coup the loss so that it did not fall to local residents by raising the level of council tax.

In response, Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources, stated that the recent fraud was a reminder to us all that we must remain vigilant to the threat of such sophisticated fraudsters. As a result of the fraud, the Council's processes had been reviewed and strengthened.

The level of council tax had already been fixed for this year (2023 to 2024) and provision had been made in the forecast for this year's budget to address the pressure created by the fraud, which was an isolated incident. The level of council tax for next year (2024 to 2025) would be debated by Council in February 2024. Council tax accounted for around a fifth of the Council's total income budget and would continue to be an important local income stream to support the delivery of much valued local services.

2. **Terry Charles**, a resident in the district made a statement in connection with the sometimes limiting time allowance of five minutes allocated to public speakers during the Council agenda item 'public participation'. He continued to speak on issues relating to members' engagement with the public at Council meetings in general.

In response, Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, stated that the Chair could exercise their discretion to alter the length of time each registered speaker had within the overall 30 minute time period allocated to the 'public participation' agenda item.

The current Chair was fully supportive of allowing sufficient time for a question or statement to be put and this approach was supported by the current Vice Chair, Leader of the Council and Group Leaders. If, however, several people had registered to speak then the Chair would try and ensure that each person was given a fair time allocation in which to put their question or statement in order to facilitate all speakers within the overall 30 minute time period.

3. In the absence of **Melanie Soanes**, a resident of Moreton Hall, Bury St Edmunds and Chair of the Moreton Hall Residents' Association, who was unable to attend the meeting, Councillor Birgitte Mager, one of the ward members for Moreton Hall read out a statement on Ms Soanes' behalf.

The statement was in connection with the perceived lack of lorry park facilities to accommodate the extensive increase in HGVs accessing the site at Suffolk Business Park, Bury St Edmunds. Concern was also expressed regarding the adverse impact caused by the amount of logistics and freight lorries accessing the Park via the residential area.

In response, Councillor Indy Wijenayaka, Portfolio Holder for Growth, explained that provision was made for lorry parking at Rougham Hill, which was within proximity of Suffolk Business Park and the A14. The Council had previously supported a Councillor Call for Action for Suffolk County Council (SCC), as Highways Authority to address the issues of HGVs travelling through the residential areas of Moreton Hall. Engagement with SCC would continue to be made regarding progress on this matter.

Engagement had also been held with SCC as Highways Authority to explore the need and demand for lorry park provision throughout the development of West Suffolk Council's new Local Plan. No additional need had been identified as yet, with two operational truck stops at nearby Rougham Hill and Risby, with further provision at Saxham Business Park which had not yet been implemented.

4. **Richard Gee**, Director of Sansovino Developments Limited, made a statement in connection with the West Suffolk Local Plan (Regulation 19) document.

Sansovino owned the 60 hectare Hatchfield Farm site in Newmarket. Mr Gee expressed concern that a further phase of mixed use development at Hatchfield Farm, as put forward in the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan, had now been omitted. He considered the site offered a sustainable pattern of land uses to support future growth in Newmarket and West Suffolk.

Mr Gee explained that the document inaccurately stated that Hatchfield Farm 'has a planning permission but development has not yet commenced....' and that he considered Hatchfield Farm was one of Newmarket's and West Suffolk's leading development sites for a number of reasons provided in his statement.

He urged Council to re-introduce the second phase allocation at Hatchfield Farm into the Regulation 19 submission version of the Local Plan.

In response, Councillor Jim Thorndyke, Portfolio Holder for Planning, thanked Mr Gee for his statement, acknowledging the inaccuracy stating that the Local Plan had evolved over time and subject to approval when this agenda item was reached later this evening, this element would be corrected prior to consultation.

No further questions were asked or statements made. The Chair concluded this item and invited the members of the public present to remain in the meeting to observe the following agenda items should they wish to do so.

322. **Leader's statement (Paper number: COU/WS/23/018)**

Councillor Waterman, Leader of the Council, presented his Leader's Statement as outlined in paper number: COU/WS/23/018.

In his introductory remarks, Councillor Waterman:

- a. **Strategic Priorities and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024 to 2028:** drew attention to setting the Council's strategic priorities and vision for West Suffolk together with the MTFS which underpinned the priorities. He thanked those that had contributed to the formation of the priorities which would help the Council to meet the challenges faced by the district and provide better support to communities and businesses both now and in the future. Councillor Waterman highlighted that through strengthened engagement, the voices of local people would be at the heart of shaping the Council's activities.
- b. **Grass cutting:** new proposals would come forward in the forthcoming budget to invest approximately £200,000 on additional skilled workforce within the grass cutting and grounds maintenance team and increasing equipment needs, as well as reducing commercial work to ensure the Council's resources kept up with demand. This action had arisen following a review of the current arrangements which was led by Councillor Ian Shipp and involved input from members and various key partners, parish and town councils and organisations.
- c. **West Suffolk Local Plan:** highlighted key policies of the Local Plan (Regulation 19) document which subject to approval later in the meeting, would go out to consultation in January 2024. Councillor Waterman thanked all who had contributed to this vital work.
- d. **Provincial House, Haverhill:** was pleased that Cabinet had approved up to £2 million investment in Haverhill for Provincial House. This provided opportunities to grow the local economy and support sustainable communities.
- e. **Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme:** expressed his support for the proposal to provide 100 percent council tax discount to eligible persons for another year.
- f. **Mildenhall pump track:** was pleased to hear that a brand new, free-to-use pump track was shortly to be opened at the Mildenhall Hub site.

The £112,000 facility had been built by West Suffolk Council and was delivered on time and within budget.

- g. **Councillor Sarah Pugh:** offered his congratulations to Councillor Pugh who had been voted on to the Executive of the Rural Services Network at its recent Annual General Meeting.
- h. **Achievements for the year:** explained that on behalf of all councillors, he had attended a staff event which included the opportunity to celebrate achievements made in the last year.

Part A: Questions on the Leader's statement

In accordance with the recently amended Council Procedure Rules, the Leader firstly responded to a range of questions relating to his statement itself:

- a. **Provincial House, Haverhill:** that investment in Provincial House was an integral, exciting part of the overall strategy to develop Haverhill. Councillor Margaret Marks asked a specific question regarding the reasons for borrowing approximately £2 million for the project and whether the Eastern Education Group (West Suffolk College) would be contributing; whether there was a fully costed business case, and if so, for it to be shared with members so the implications of the scheme, and particularly its impact on the town, could be considered. A written response would be provided following the meeting by Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources.
- b. **Barley Homes:** that although Barley Homes was a commercial operation, the company provided a blended return whereby it also aimed to achieve the Council's priorities, one of which was to address provision of affordable housing.
- c. **Comments from Councillor Nick Clarke, Leader of the Conservative Group:** These comments were in relation to the strategic priorities; Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS); West Suffolk Local Plan process; and external borrowing utilised for investment in Provincial House rather than internal borrowing. Councillor Waterman stated that he welcomed support from all members to the proposed strategic priorities that would be considered next on the agenda. Careful consideration had been given to them by the West Suffolk Working Partnership and examples were given on how they differed from the existing and where development of the priorities would evolve over time. He positively acknowledged Councillor Clarke's comments on the continuation of the 100 percent council tax discount for eligible persons for another year under the LCTRS; and the sterling work undertaken to develop the Local Plan over the past three years. In response to the issue regarding external borrowing, Councillor Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources explained on behalf of the Leader that borrowing would only take place once the treasury management cash-flow required the Council to do so. The Council was not currently looking at further external borrowing, estimated, for another 12 to 18

months. This would be expanded on further in the written response referred to in (a) above.

- d. **Homelessness and rough sleepers:** Councillor Ian Houlder asked a question in connection with homelessness and rough sleepers.

He acknowledged that many people that had found themselves rough sleeping often presented with complex needs. Being mindful of sensitivity and confidentiality, Councillor Houlder asked whether information could be provided to highlight some of the specific issues being presented by rough sleepers; for example, the range of age groups; the different sorts of mental and social problems being experienced; and whether individuals were citizens of West Suffolk or from elsewhere. Councillor Houlder also welcomed news on the success stories had by the team. A written response would be provided following the meeting by Councillor Richard O'Driscoll, Portfolio Holder for Housing.

- e. **Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme:** The 100 percent council tax discount for eligible persons was proposed to be extended for another year and would be reviewed again for the 2025 to 2026 scheme.
- f. **Glyphosate:** In December 2022, and following the consideration of a motion on notice, the Council took the decision to cease the use of glyphosate as a chemical weedkiller. Suffolk County Council (SCC) had also stopped its use. This therefore presented an issue that if West Suffolk Council was to re-introduce glyphosate in some areas, it would need to work closely with SCC regarding a potential compromise for its use if both authorities were clearing weeds in the same area. A review would be undertaken on this matter in preparation for next year's weed control.
- g. **West Suffolk Working Partnership:** This partnership comprised members of the West Suffolk Progressive Alliance Grouping and the Independents who were working collaboratively on Council matters.
- h. **Affordable housing:** This referred to homes sold at 80 percent of the market rate. More social housing provision in the district was an aspiration; however, this was not under the Council's direct control.

Part B: Questions to the Leader on any Council matter

The Leader then responded to questions on other Council matters:

- a. **Corn Exchange, Haverhill:** Councillor Margaret Marks read out a written question on behalf of Councillor Joe Mason in his absence. The question was in connection with the possibility of, with support from partners such as Haverhill Town Council, securing the Corn Exchange as a community asset and thus safeguarding its future. In response, Councillor Waterman stated that as part of encouraging greater engagement in the district's five towns and surrounding areas, this may be an issue that could be raised as part of that; however, no

commitment could be given towards investing in the Corn Exchange by West Suffolk Council.

- b. **Bank mandate fraud matter:** Councillor Nick Clarke stated that he was yet to receive a response to the questions he had raised at the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee meeting on 23 November 2023 and the Cabinet meeting on 5 December 2023 regarding this matter. In response, Councillor Waterman stated that his questions would be answered and as stated at the Cabinet meeting, a report (with an exempt appendix containing sensitive information) would be presented to the next meeting of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee on 25 January 2024, which would cover the issues he had raised.
- c. **Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre:** on the Leader's behalf, Councillor Ian Shipp, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, stated that work was ongoing with the Council's partners, Abbeycroft Leisure, on preparing a potential scheme to refurbish Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre. Assurance was given that critical works would be addressed as a priority. Further information would be shared with members in due course.

In connection with the written responses to questions outlined above and in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, these would be circulated to all members and published on the Council's website.

(At this point and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 2.3 of the Constitution, the Chair had previously agreed that the following items were to be considered in a different order to that set out in Council Procedure Rule 2.2.)

323. **West Suffolk Council Strategic Priorities and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028 (Report number: COU/WS/23/018)**

Council considered this report, which sought approval for the West Suffolk Council Strategic Priorities and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028.

The Strategic Priorities document (Appendix A) formed part of the Council's Policy Framework, as set out in the Constitution. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) (Appendix B) would direct the resources available to West Suffolk to underpin delivery of the Council's services and priorities as part of the annual budget setting process. Together, the two documents set the high-level parameters governing the Council's overall direction.

The MTFS set the context against which the 2024 to 2025 budget and medium term financial plans (2024 to 2028) were proposed to be developed between now and the formal Budget and Council Tax adoption meeting of the Council in February 2024.

The Strategic Priorities document set out the high-level ambitions of West Suffolk Council over the next four years. The vision, priorities and values in the document had been developed over a period of months by Cabinet, in

consultation with West Suffolk Working Partnership. The document set the strategic direction for the Council, as well as providing a framework within which future decisions would be made, and setting the priorities that would govern the Council's performance management system.

The report provided further detail on how the strategic priorities had been produced, which included how the document also explained that West Suffolk's contribution was only part of the picture. West Suffolk's role was not to directly deliver everything referred to in the document but also to play a role in influencing, partnering with and working alongside other partners, not least residents and communities.

The West Suffolk Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028 assessed and evaluated the financial resources the Council expected to have and the expenditure in order to deliver the strategic priorities.

West Suffolk's MTFS was based on six key themes, representing the Council's response to the ongoing financial challenges and opportunities surrounding local government. These key themes were summarised in paragraph 1.10 of the report.

West Suffolk Council in February 2024 would be asked to set a balanced budget for 2024 to 2025 (its statutory obligation), alongside a medium term financial plan for the period 2024 to 2028. A final and complete version of the document (alongside the West Suffolk Capital Strategy) would therefore be presented to Cabinet and Council in February 2024 alongside the main budget and council tax setting report.

Councillor Cliff Waterman, Leader of the Council, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, which included reiterating that the new ambitious plans summarised in the Strategic Priorities document would help deliver affordable, available and decent homes; environmental resilience; sustainable growth; and thriving communities in West Suffolk. Emphasis was placed on engaging with communities, stakeholders and partners to support delivery of the aforementioned priorities. Upon moving the motion, this was duly seconded by Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources who proceeded to specifically highlight elements of the proposed MTFS and how she was looking forward to working with the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee to help shape a sustainable budget for the short and medium term.

On the motion of Councillor Waterman, seconded by Councillor Hind, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 54 for the motion, none against and one abstention, it was

Resolved: That

1. the West Suffolk Strategic Priorities, as set out in Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/019, be adopted.
2. the Themes of the West Suffolk Medium Term Financial Strategy, be adopted as the strategic financial framework to apply from 1

April 2024, as set out in Appendix B to Report number: COU/WS/23/019.

3. Delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive and the Director (Resources and Property), in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Resources to make any minor typographical, grammatical, factual or contextual changes to the documents, provided they do not materially affect the meaning or substance of the documents.

324. Referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet (Report numbers: COU/WS/23/020 and COU/WS/23/021)

Council considered the referrals report of recommendations from Cabinet, as contained within report number: COU/WS/23/020. In addition to the overall summary of Cabinet referrals, Council also considered Report number: COU/WS/23/021, which contained the specific referral on the 'West Suffolk Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) Consultation and Submission'.

A. Referrals from Cabinet: 14 November 2023

There were no referrals emanating from the last meetings of Cabinet held on 14 November 2023.

B. Referrals from Cabinet: 5 December 2023

1. Treasury Management Report (September 2023)

Approval was sought for the Treasury Management Report (September 2023).

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources drew relevant issues to the attention of Council.

On the motion of Councillor Hind, seconded by Councillor Marilyn Sayer, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 53 for the motion, none against and two abstentions, it was

Resolved:

That the Treasury Management Report (September 2023), as contained in Report number FRS/WS/23/005, be approved.

2. West Suffolk Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) Consultation and Submission (Report number: COU/WS/23/021)

(Councillor Broughton declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as she and her husband owned a parcel of land within an area in Great Barton identified within the West Suffolk Local Plan (Regulation 19) consultation document. She left the meeting during the consideration of this item and did not return, and therefore, she did not take part in the debate or the vote.)

(Councillor Stennett declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as he owned parcels of land (in a partnership); had land where he was a company director; and his parents and distant family owned parcels of land in the district. All of these parcels of land had been identified within the West Suffolk Local Plan (Regulation 19) consultation document. Councillor Stennett also declared in the interests of transparency that as director of development company, Ingham Developments, he had business relationships with numerous other companies that may have interests in land in the district which were included in the Regulation 19 Local Plan. Councillor Stennett left the meeting during the consideration of this item and did not return, and therefore, he did not take part in the debate or the vote.)

On 5 December 2023, the Cabinet had considered Report number: CAB/WS/23/056 'West Suffolk Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) Consultation and Submission'.

The Cabinet had considered that the West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document was both final and sound and that, subject to the outcome of the independent examination, it had recommended to Council that it should approve the Local Plan and supporting documentation for public consultation and its subsequent submission to the Secretary of State for the purposes of independent examination. The Cabinet had made a minor amendment to Recommendation (3) which removed a potential time constraint and Appendix A (the West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document itself) had since been updated following the Cabinet meeting to include the Policies Map.

Members were therefore requested to consider Report number: COU/WS/23/021 attached to the referrals report, which provided an updated version of the Cabinet report (CAB/WS/23/056). For clarity, this captured the amended Recommendation (3) and provided a link to the West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document which included the Policies Map.

Council considered Report number: COU/WS/23/021, which sought approval of the West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document, together with supporting documents, for consultation.

Approval of the Proposed Submission Local Plan and Policies Map would allow the Local Plan to be subject to its final round of consultation (scheduled for 30 January 2024 to 5 March 2024); and if approved and following consultation, the Local Plan would be submitted to the Secretary of State for the purpose of independent examination.

The final West Suffolk Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation would be focused on the whether the plan was a 'legally compliant' and 'sound' document. This was a technical consultation which would ask the public and stakeholders specific questions required by the Planning Inspectorate and required that representations consider whether the tests of soundness had been met.

Councillor Jim Thorndyke, Portfolio Holder for Planning, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including paying tribute to the Local Plan Working Group for their contributions towards shaping the Plan. Upon moving the

recommendations, Councillor Thorndyke made an amendment to Recommendation (1), as indicated with emboldened text:

'The West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document (Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/021), **as amended to replace the word 'required' with the word 'encouraged' in the third paragraph of Policy LP25, 'Custom and Self-Build Homes'**, together with supporting documents be approved for public consultation and its subsequent submission to the Secretary of State for the purposes of independent examination.

This amendment was made to ensure Policy LP25, 'Custom and Self-Build Homes' was sufficiently robust. It had been ascertained since the publication of the Local Plan (Regulation 19) document (Appendix A) that a requirement of ten percent self-build and custom build homes of large sites would impact the viability and deliverability of other policies, for example, affordable housing and climate change policy requirements. The third paragraph of Policy LP25 would now therefore read:

'All proposals for development of 100 homes or more will be encouraged to provide at least ten percent of the total homes as custom and/or self-build plots.'

This change was considered relatively small when compared to delivering the Council's strategic priorities which sought to achieve more affordable and sustainable homes.

The motion, to include the amended recommendation set out above, was duly seconded by Councillor David Smith.

The debate ensued with positive comments particularly made on the key policies set out in paragraph 2.7 of the report. The majority of members specifically supported the climate change policy which would require sustainable construction with a fabric first approach to achieve carbon reduction through energy efficiency and photovoltaic panels on all roofs where practically possible; the new health and wellbeing policy, which proposed that linking the design and delivery of homes to health and wellbeing set out the Council's intention to deliver growth for the benefit of people; and the policy which proposed an increase of the current requirement of 30 percent affordable homes to 40 percent affordable housing on greenfield sites to deliver much needed homes for West Suffolk's communities.

The majority of members commended the Local Plan, acknowledging approximately three years of work to reach this point. Recognition was given to the Local Plan Working Group, which comprised members from across the Council's political spectrum, for their thorough input and detailed discussion on the various elements of the Plan. This included placing thanks on record to former district Councillor David Roach, as former Portfolio Holder for Planning and Chair of the Local Plan Working Group prior to the May 2023 district council elections. Recognition was also given to the public and stakeholders who had made representations as part of previous consultations; and to officers for their sterling work in supporting the process.

Some reservations, however, were expressed regarding:

- The proposed amendment to Policy LP25, 'Custom and Self-Build Homes' as the change would effectively dilute the policy and this would result in insufficient numbers of homes being built in an alternative way.
- Policy SP6, 'Biodiversity Net Gain' (BNG), where it was proposed that new development proposals should achieve the legally required minimum of ten percent BNG. It was felt that this may be a missed opportunity and it was suggested that a minimum of 20 percent BNG should be achieved instead.
- That work should continue to press Suffolk County Council as Highways Authority and Local Education Authority to provide the required infrastructure and education provision for new developments, as appropriate.
- The robustness of the Local Plan upon submission for examination by the Planning Inspectorate.
- Limited growth proposals for Brandon; however, Councillor Victor Lukaniuk, Deputy Leader of the Council and one of the ward members for Brandon, was pleased that despite the environmental constraints which limited growth in the town, provision had been made in the Plan whereby the Council would use its best endeavours to achieve a solution to successfully deliver sustainable growth in Brandon whilst working within the current constraints.

In his right of reply, Councillor Thorndyke duly responded to the issues raised above. Reservations were acknowledged; however, he reiterated that working within legal parameters that could be constrictive, future developments also needed to remain viable and deliverable.

On the motion of Councillor Thorndyke, seconded by Councillor David Smith, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 48 for the motion, none against and two abstentions, it was

Resolved:

That

1. The West Suffolk Local Plan Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) document (Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/021), as amended to replace the word 'required' with the word 'encouraged' in the third paragraph of Policy LP25, 'Custom and Self-Build Homes', together with supporting documents be approved for public consultation and its subsequent submission to the Secretary of State for the purposes of independent examination.
2. Delegated authority be given to the Director (Planning and Growth), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning to make any presentational improvements or minor non-material consequential changes to the document as necessary prior to the consultation commencing.
3. Delegated authority be given to the Director (Planning and Growth), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning to

agree and consult upon a set of proposed modifications during the examination process.

(Councillors Paul Firman, John Griffiths and Aaron Luccarini left the meeting during the consideration of this item and therefore did not vote on the item. Councillors Andy Drummond, Susan Glossop and Mildmay-White left the meeting at the conclusion of this item after the vote.)

3. West Suffolk Council Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) 2024 to 2025

Approval was sought for West Suffolk Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024 to 2025.

Each year the Council was required to review its Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS). Report number: CAB/WS/23/057 provided an annual review of the 2023 to 2024 scheme and proposed to make changes to the scheme for 2024 to 2025.

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that it was being proposed to extend the maximum reduction on council tax paid of 100 percent for a further 12 months. This would take effect from 1 April 2024 (and last for one year only). This would be a means tested scheme and was designed to support low-income working age residents, in light of the current pressures on the cost of living. This proposal was set out further in paragraph 2.2 of the report.

A consultation on the proposals was held from 2 October to 30 October 2023. Major preceptors and stakeholders had responded and the responses received and the key points raised were covered in section 4 of the report. It was noted that 90.2 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to extend the maximum discount on council tax.

On the motion of Councillor Hind, seconded by Councillor Julia Wakelam, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved:

That

1. The Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTRS) Scheme for 2023 to 2024 as outlined in Report number: CAB/WS/23/057, be reviewed.
2. The changes to the Scheme outlined in section 2 of Report number: CAB/WS/23/057 and that the maximum discount change only relates to 2024 to 2025 in line with the recent consultation, be agreed.

4. Council tax base for tax setting purposes 2024 to 2025

Approval was sought for the council tax base for tax setting purposes for 2024 to 2025.

Report number: CAB/WS/23/058 explained that the council tax base was the total taxable value at a point in time of all the domestic properties in the Council's area. It was a yearly calculation and represented the estimated number of chargeable dwellings after allowing for exemptions and discounts, projected changes in the property base and after applying an estimated collection rate.

The calculation of the tax base for council tax setting purposes consisted of three stages, details of which were set out in the report.

Councillor Diane Hind, Portfolio Holder for Resources, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, and referred to paragraph 2.5 of Report number CAB/WS/23/058 which explained that the resulting tax base figure for council tax collection purposes, expressed in terms of the number of band D equivalent properties, was 58,684.97 for 2024 to 2025. This was an increase of 697.96 on the tax base for the current year of 57,987.01.

The tax base figure for West Suffolk, as outlined in paragraph 2.6 of the Cabinet report was analysed further across the individual town and parish councils to form their tax base figures for the purpose of budget setting and determining the parish band D tax levels in each of those areas. The town and parish tax base figures were set out in Appendix 3 of the Cabinet report.

On the motion of Councillor Hind, seconded by Councillor Jon London, it was put to the vote and with the vote being unanimous, it was

Resolved:

That

1. The tax base for 2024 to 2025, for the whole of West Suffolk be 58,684.97 equivalent band D dwellings, as detailed in paragraph 2.3 of Report number: CAB/WS/23/058.
2. The tax base for 2024 to 2025 for the different parts of its area, as defined by parish or special expense area boundaries, be as shown in Appendix 3 to Report number: CAB/WS/23/058.

325. Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel: Members' Allowances Scheme (Report number: COU/WS/23/022)

Council considered this report, which sought approval for a new Members' Allowances Scheme, as recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

In September 2023, an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) was appointed by West Suffolk Council in order to advise on the levels of remuneration that should be paid to members elected to West Suffolk Council.

The Panel met on several occasions throughout October and November 2023 and considered a range of material to support its deliberations for recommending a new Members' Allowances Scheme for potential adoption by the Council.

The following documents were attached to the report for consideration:

Annex A: A detailed report prepared by the Panel providing details on the rationale that supports their recommendations for the new scheme.

Appendix 1 to Annex A: A new Members' Allowances Scheme, proposed by the Independent Remuneration Panel for the Council to consider and adopt, as appropriate.

Appendix 2 to Annex A: Supporting material considered by the Independent Remuneration Panel to assist their work.

The Chair welcomed Sue Putters, Chair of the IRP, together with Tricia Bernard-Hector and David Irvine, two of her fellow panel members to the meeting. The fourth panel member, Sandra Cox was unable to attend.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including thanking the IRP for its work and recognising that in making its recommendations, it often needed to make difficult decisions.

With consent of the Chair, Councillor Kelly duly invited Sue Putters to present the report of the IRP. She summarised the content and highlighted key issues that had been considered by the Panel which had resulted in the proposed Members' Allowances Scheme for adoption.

Councillor Kelly then moved the motion, which was duly seconded by Councillor Victor Lukaniuk.

The majority of members supported the new scheme, commending the IRP for the thorough piece of work undertaken and the rationale behind its recommendations.

Whilst also commending the IRP for its work and recognising the factors set out in 4.2 of the Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (Annex A), other members were disappointed with elements of the proposed new scheme, in particular that no Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) had been recommended for members appointed to the Development Control Committee. Given the significant time commitment that was considered to be far in excess to those members sitting on other committees, it was felt an SRA for these members was warranted. The rationale for not recommending an SRA for this post had been considered as set out in paragraph 7.25 of the IRP's report; however, it was felt that whilst the Committee was not short of members, some were discouraged from volunteering to sit on the Committee due to the amount of time involved; balancing their work commitments; and the potential financial implications if needing to take time off work. An SRA might have encouraged more members to come forward which would allow the political groups to have a wider pool of members from which to appoint.

On the motion of Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor Lukaniuk, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 28 for the motion, 5 against and 14 abstentions, it was

Resolved: That

1. The content of the Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel, as contained in Annex A to Report number: COU/WS/23/022, be noted.
2. The new West Suffolk Council Members' Allowances Scheme proposed by the Independent Remuneration Panel, as contained in Appendix 1 of Annex A to Report number: COU/WS/23/022, be adopted for implementation from 1 February 2024.

The Chair thanked the members of the Independent Remuneration Panel present for attending and invited them to remain in the meeting to observe the following agenda items should they wish to do so.

326. Polling district and polling place review (Report number: COU/WS/23/023)

Council considered this report, which principally sought approval for the amended scheme of polling districts and polling places within West Suffolk.

On 26 September 2023, Council agreed to undertake an interim review of polling places, as set out in section 2 of Report number: COU/WS/23/016.

The draft schedule of polling districts and polling places, which was included at Appendix A to Report COU/WS/23/016, detailed the current arrangements for polling districts and polling places and comments relating to areas which were considered as part of this review. The outcomes of the areas reviewed were detailed in section 2 of Report number: COU/WS/23/023 with the proposed recommendations and actions required to be taken to make any recommended changes, as appropriate, also detailed.

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Regulatory, drew relevant issues to the attention of Council, including that the Council had a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district. The Council was also required to seek to ensure that all electors had reasonable facilities for voting as were practicable in the circumstances; and to ensure that so far as was reasonable and practicable, every polling place was accessible to electors who had a disability. The review had sought to satisfactorily meet these obligations; however, it was ultimately the decision of the voter to choose the most convenient way for them to vote. If they did not wish to vote in person at a polling station, they could appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf or vote by post, which was a method actively promoted by West Suffolk Council.

The majority of members supported the outcomes of the review and the proposed amendments to the polling districts and polling places scheme, and the other recommendations proposed; however, some concern was expressed by Councillors Richard Rout and Ian Houlder regarding specific issues with polling places located within their respective wards.

On the motion of Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor Richard O'Driscoll, it was put to the vote and with the vote being 44 for the motion, none against and three abstentions, it was

Resolved: That

1. The amended scheme of polling districts and polling places as set out at Appendix A to Report number: COU/WS/23/023, be approved.
2. The Chief Executive be authorised to amend the scheme of polling districts and polling places for Moreton Hall Ward and Haverhill West Ward following completion of the necessary assessments, as detailed in the Report number: COU/WS/23/023, and in consultation with relevant ward members.
3. The Chief Executive be authorised, as Electoral Registration Officer, to take the necessary measures as soon as possible to give effect to parliamentary constituency changes, ensuring that the register reflects existing and new constituencies, until the boundaries are fully in force.
4. It be noted that power to designate polling places is delegated to the Chief Executive. It be agreed that such power be exercised where the decision is required at short notice and it is not possible to await a decision of Council.

327. Use of Chief Executive's urgency powers

Council considered a narrative item which reported on the use of the Chief Executive's urgency powers.

Under Part 3, Section 5, Scheme of Delegation to Officers, paragraph 14 of the Council's Constitution, it stated:

'Where, in the opinion of the Chief Executive, by reason of limitation of time or urgency, a decision is required on any matter, after such consultation as they consider necessary (or as is required by the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules in Part 4 of the Constitution), they shall have power to make a decision provided that any such decision shall be reported to the next meeting of the Cabinet, appropriate Committee or Council.....'

On 11 December 2023, the Chief Executive exercised his urgency powers to make some changes to the Council Procedure Rules contained in Part 4 of the Constitution.

These amendments related to the:

- Order of business on Council agendas so that public participation was considered before the Leader's statement
- Procedure rules regarding public participation

- Procedure rules regarding questions to the Leader on the presentation of the Leader's statement

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Council, Leader of the Council and Group Leaders were consulted on this matter prior to the decision being made, for which all had expressed their support.

In accordance with the Constitution, Council duly noted the use of the Chief Executive's urgency powers in respect of making the decision outlined above.

328. Any other urgent business

There were no matters of urgent business considered on this occasion.

The meeting concluded at 9.32 pm

Signed by:

Chair
